Aṅgulimāla's Journey

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:02:04

Tonight I'd like to tell a story from the time of the Buddha. Some of you may be familiar with at least parts of this story. It's the story of a mass murderer at the time of the Buddha. His name, his first name was Ahimsaka, which meant "harmless." And then he gained the name Aṅgulimāla—the literal meaning of that phrase is "finger garland"—because he is said to have cut off the little fingers of all of his victims and strung them on a garland around his neck. This was a horrific figure, a murderer at the time of the Buddha.

The basic story that most of us are familiar with comes from the suttas. There's a whole sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya, the middle-length discourses, about this person. But there's also in the commentaries a kind of backstory of how Ahimsaka changed from being harmless to being a mass murderer. To me, that backstory is very moving in many ways—moving in the way of opening our eyes around ways in which we affect each other.

The other night, when Gil spoke about the Buddhist teachings on social and communal harmony and how the way that we engage in the world, if we're acting out of greed, aversion, and delusion, it's not only affecting our own minds, it's affecting those whom we meet. This story demonstrates that part of life. I think you may also notice some resonances in this backstory in terms of things that go on today, and you may reflect on how little our minds have changed in 2,600 years and how applicable the teachings of the Buddha still are to us.

Some aspects of this story seem almost magical or mystical or mythological. We don't actually know how much of this story is true, but it does seem that at least some aspects of it—just as there was probably the historical person of the Buddha—there was probably this historical person of this mass murderer. This story is ultimately a story of redemption. For myself, I find some inspiration in it. There's a way in which, at times in my practice, thinking about this story, I've thought, "Well, if Aṅgulimāla can do it, maybe I can too."

So the backstory. I'll read some of it and summarize some of it.

At the Buddha's time, at the court of King Pasenadi of Kosala, there was a learned Brahmin who held the office of royal chaplain and was thus one of the kingdom's highest dignitaries. One night, his wife gave birth to a son. Soon afterwards, the father cast the boy's horoscope and to his consternation found that his son was born under the robber constellation. This indicated that the boy would have within him a tendency to commit robbery.

On that same day of the child's birth, there was another disquieting event. All the weapons in the armory in the city of Sāvatthī had suddenly begun to sparkle. In the morning, the Brahmin went to the palace as usual and asked the king how he had slept.

"How could I have slept well?" replied the king. "I woke up in the night and saw that my auspicious weapons lying at the end of my bed were in bright sparkle, and so I was afraid and perturbed. Should this mean danger to the kingdom or my life?"

The Brahmin said, "The same strange thing happened in the entire city, and it does not concern you. Last night my wife bore a son, and unfortunately his horoscope had the robber constellation. This must have caused the weapons to sparkle."

The king asked, "Will he be a lone robber or the chief of a gang?"

"He will do it alone, your majesty."

"What if I were to kill him now and prevent further misdeeds?"

So the father was actually proposing, willing to sacrifice his own son for this. But the king responded, "As he would be a loner, let him be raised and properly educated. Then perhaps he may lose those evil tendencies."

There's this nature-nurture question alive even here at the time of the Buddha—the idea that a loving home and a good family and education and ethics would support a mind moving in a wholesome direction. This is why the boy was called Ahimsaka, harmless, to incline his mind in that direction.

He grew up. He was quite well-behaved, very strong in body, but he was also studious and intelligent. His parents had good reason to think any evil tendencies had been removed by good education and by the religious atmosphere of the home. This made them very happy.

In due course, his father sent Ahimsaka for the traditional studies to Takkasilā, the famous university of India. He was accepted by the foremost teacher of that university and continued to be studious, so he surpassed his fellow students. He also became his teacher's favorite.

This made his fellow students very jealous. "Since that young Ahimsaka came, we are almost forgotten. We must put a stop to it and cause a break between him and the teacher."

So they began trying to slander Ahimsaka. This didn't apparently work very well because his conduct was so upstanding. They decided they had to alienate the teacher from his favorite student.

And they realized they couldn't accomplish this through simple means—they had to create a plot, a plan. So they decided to form separate groups of people who would go to the teacher independently, as if they were unconnected to each other, and tell the teacher that they had heard or sensed that Ahimsaka was plotting against him.

The first time this happened, the teacher dismissed it out of hand. The second time it happened, again, he dismissed it out of hand. The third time, the group cunningly added—and I have to say that whatever they were claiming, this plotting, it was all fabrication. There was no truth whatsoever to this. They were lying to his teacher. Fake news.

With the third group, they not only told the same lie to the teacher, but they added this little extra bit. They said, "If you don't trust us, examine it for yourself. Check it out for yourself."

From this poisonous seed, a suspicion took root in the teacher's heart, and he came to believe that Ahimsaka actually wanted to push him out. Once a suspicion is roused, one can always find something that seems to confirm it.

I'm going to stop there with the story because that's something to explore and reflect on in terms of our own minds—how views affect us.

So far what we've had is the jealousy of the students, an unwholesome mind state that clouds our minds. Probably an equal mixture of greed, aversion, and delusion comprises jealousy. Aversion to not having the relationship with the teacher that they'd once had. Envy of Ahimsaka's close relationship to the teacher. And delusion that this was all a problem, that they had to fix this somehow, change this somehow.

From this jealousy, they felt they had to create a separation. And the only way they knew how to do it was through lying, through falsehoods, through unethical behavior—through propaganda essentially, because they consciously crafted this message: "We hear Ahimsaka is planning to harm you, planning to throw you out, plotting against you." And it came in three different ways from seemingly three different directions, unconnected.

This points to how views can begin to develop in our minds. We hear something multiple times and that seed of doubt, that "hmm, maybe it is true," begins to take root. We become more likely to believe it.

The story even points to how once suspicion is roused, one can always find something that seems to confirm it. This is really that function of our minds given the name these days of confirmation bias. If we have a particular view or belief, the way our minds tend to work is not rationally taking in information and weighing it impartially. Our minds actively search out things that confirm our beliefs and actively ignore things that don't confirm our beliefs. This is well researched and documented—how our minds bias themselves toward our views and beliefs, discounting information to the contrary as unreliable while feeling that information supporting our own view is reliable.

This dynamic of people holding different views and how that plays out—this has been happening for thousands of years in human minds. It's not new what's happening in our own minds, in our cultures. It's not new that people try to sow dissent between others out of jealousy or greed or hatred. These are tendencies of the human mind.

In some ways, it's a frightening aspect of our minds, this confirmation bias and the almost willful ignorance. It's not consciously willful ignoring of perspectives that don't support our own view, but it is a function of how our human system tends to work. And it particularly tends to work that way when we aren't aware that it works that way.

There are studies that point to how, if people are given the chance to reflect on their perspective, asked questions about it, and begin to recognize that maybe they don't know as much about something as they thought they did, then they begin to have a more even-handed approach to taking in information. Knowing this about our minds, knowing this piece of information about our minds, is really useful. It's a powerful function, really connected to delusion, this confirmation bias. It's connected to how our minds obscure things.

The creation of views itself is quite a thing to reflect on as well. In this case, the story talks about multiple sources coming at the teacher. But there are studies—I was reviewing an article called "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds," which seems to certainly have some truth to it—pointing to how quickly views become established in our minds.

There was a research study done, and I just have the barest outline of it, but students were given one of two packets of information containing a story about a firefighter who was either a risk-taker or a risk-averse person. In some packets, the risk-averse firefighter had won accolades for his skill, described as a successful and good firefighter. In the other packets, the firefighter was always failing to save lives, had been written up, and hadn't been a very good firefighter.

So there was just one story the people were given in this study. And then, almost immediately, they were told that the entire thing had been made up. They were given this packet of information and then told, "Oh, by the way, that was just a completely fabricated story, no truth to it whatsoever."

Later—I don't know how much later they asked this question—they asked how much participants thought being risk-averse or a risk-taker would affect someone's performance as a firefighter.

And the answers were split right exactly along the lines of the packets they had been given. The ones who'd been told that the risk-averse person was a good firefighter believed that being risk-averse would make someone a good firefighter. The ones who'd been told the risk-taker was successful believed that would lead to somebody being a good firefighter. So one exposure to information, told immediately it was made up, and still it influenced the view.

That to me brought quite a bit of pause. It's almost as if our minds may be predisposed to believe the first thing they hear. And so if that's the case, we really ought to take care with that understanding—that beliefs are happening. This is really a big area of delusion: beliefs are operating and we are not aware they're beliefs. We simply take them to be the way it is.

The more we can be curious about whether we're acting out of beliefs, the more we might ask ourselves:

what belief is motivating my action right now? Even if it's just exposed—"oh, this is a belief happening"—that at least gives a little bit of space in the mind to not simply take it to be truth.

So in this story, the information was false, but repeated with confidence, it created that seed of doubt in the teacher's mind. And given that, starting to look for evidence with that kind of proposal—"well, you check it out"—the mind began to overlay that view onto Ahimsaka's behavior and to find things that were evidence of him trying to overthrow the teacher. He found this supposed evidence.

And he decided this was dangerous, that this strong student of his was trying to overthrow him, was a danger to him. The teacher's suspicion grew into conviction: I must kill him, or get him killed. But he considered, it will not be easy to kill such a strong man. Besides, if he's slain while living here as my pupil, it will harm my reputation and students may no longer come to me. I must think of some other device to get rid of him as well as punish him.

So the teacher is taking action now. And he does not know at this point that he's acting on falsehood. He thinks he's done an independent investigation, unaware that his mind was clouded and skewed in the gathering of information. Unaware that the evidence he thinks he's gathered has already been biased from the view that was looking for it.

The students told the lie knowing it was a lie, wanting to get rid of Ahimsaka, wanting to separate the teacher from him. The teacher is acting on what he thinks is truth, and yet his actions too are beginning to be motivated by aversion and hatred, by anger.

I think a big piece of this story—at least one thread that runs through it—is the thread around sila, around ethics. Because at each step, if the students had reflected on the action they were taking as being unethical, as being a lie, as not a wholesome way to engage, then they might not have done that action.

The teacher, behaving based on what he thinks is truth—he had no reason to believe that the students were lying after he confirmed it himself. And yet his actions too are based in anger and motivated by anger. He's looking for ways to harm his student, looking for ways to get rid of his student. Feeling justified perhaps because there is danger.

This happens all over the place. We may feel like we are acting in self-righteousness or self-defense, that the action is justified. And yet this is a place where the teaching of ethics grounds us: these actions are not wholesome. Is there some other kind of action that might be taken? There were many other actions the teacher could have taken—talking to Ahimsaka to find out what's going on, for instance.

The next part of the story is the teacher creating this plot, this scheme. Ahimsaka's course of studies was coming to an end, and the teacher used that as an opportunity. At that time in India, there was a kind of honoring of the teacher at the end of your course of studies. And he points to this.

"My dear Ahimsaka, for one who has completed their studies, it is a duty to give a gift of honor to the

teacher. So give it to me."

"Certainly, Master, what shall I give?"

"You must bring me a thousand human little fingers of the right hand. Then you'll be concluding your ceremonial homage to the science you have learned."

Ahimsaka is horrified by this suggestion and says, "I can't do that. My family has never been engaged in violence. My name is Harmless. My family has always been harmless."

The teacher simply said, "Well, if you don't do this, the studies that you have done will yield no fruit."

And with that, Ahimsaka consented.

This is a kind of odd piece of the story.

And yet, if we reflect on the situation here, in this place of the story, the commentaries pause and ask: Why would Ahimsaka do this? Some of it is pointed back to his underlying tendencies—the fact that it's said he was born under this robber constellation, that he had these deep underlying tendencies that might not have been fully redirected by his upbringing. That's one explanation.

The other explanation is the guru devotion aspect that was often a piece, I understand, of the teacher-student relationship. Your teacher asks you to do something, and it's an honoring of the teacher to do it, to trust in the teacher. If we think about how this can play out, it's not only a teacher-student relationship, but there's also a power dynamic there—someone who has more power, more authority, asking you to do something. Almost like there's something in our makeup, our social hierarchy makeup, that gives over our authority to somebody in power.

This is not only true at the time of the Buddha in this kind of teacher-student relationship, but seems to be true now, today. There were questions after the Second World War: How could people do all of these horrible things? Imprisoning and killing the Jewish people—how could that happen? Scientists were curious about this authority piece.

One very famous set of studies, which many of you have probably heard of, were the Milgram experiments done in the early 1960s at Yale University. They were looking at how people would relate to authority and whether they would do something when an authority figure told them to that they wouldn't otherwise do.

The experiment was set up so that a person came to the lab—actually two people came, but one of them was a ringer, an actor. That person always became the one who would be the recipient of a set of shocks. This was supposed to be a study on learning, where questions would be asked, and if the person got the answer wrong, they would be given a shock—supposedly testing the use of negative reinforcement for learning.

The person being experimented on was asked to turn up the voltage on the shock when the "student" kept getting wrong answers. The voltage readout started at 15, marked "mild," and went up to 450, with a big red indicator that said "Danger."

When the person giving the shocks expressed hesitancy—when they didn't want to continue, didn't want to turn up the voltage—the experimenter standing in the room would say things like, "No, please continue," or "You must continue," or "The experiment requires you to continue," or "You have no choice but to continue."

In these studies, two-thirds of the participants gave the highest level of shock. Two-thirds. Everyone gave a substantial level of shocks.

This is what Milgram wrote: "I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because they were ordered to do so by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the participant's strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and with the participant's ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won out more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact that most urgently demands explanation."

So this kind of power, this authority, may have played a big role in Angulimala's acquiescence.

Variations on this study revealed that even simple modifications made a difference—like whether the experimenter was wearing a lab coat or not. When they didn't wear the lab coat, the willingness to continue dropped from two-thirds of the people to only 20%. Another variation had the experimenter remind the participants that they bore the ethical responsibility for any harm that would come to the other person. With that reminder, almost nobody followed through.

A simple reminding that our actions are our own ethical responsibility—that reminder was very powerful. Just remembering: "Yes, some authority figure tells me to do it, but it's my responsibility."

So this is maybe what Ahimsaka did not remember—that he was bearing the responsibility for the harm that would come to these victims.

Again, with this story, we see the playing out of ethics. Ethics is about non-harming. In so many places along the way, harming is generating more harming. This influence we have on each other, the conditioning nature we have on each other, the way ignorance and delusion are running the show. And there's a piece here about how grounding ourselves in ethics can help us recognize when we are being guided by delusion.

This is why, I think, the Buddha emphasized sīla so much. It really helps us to recognize: Is this going to cause harm? Basically, I think he's saying, if your action is going to cause harm, there's delusion there.

There's danger there. There's greed or aversion there. So take care.

And so the story continues.

Ahimsaka went out and marauded the neighborhood, killing hundreds of people. He reached 999 victims. He started in the forest, but after he had killed people passing through, travelers stopped coming that way. Unable to find more victims in the forest, he began going into the villages, grabbing people from their homes, killing them where they lived. The villages became abandoned, and the people in this area went to the king, pleading, "You must take care of this man. He is creating havoc. He has killed hundreds of people." And so the king sent out an army to find Angulimala and kill him.

At the same time, his mother heard about this murderer roaming the neighborhood. Her suspicion was piqued. She had the intuition that this was her son. No one had identified him—the name given to this person at this point was Angulimala, not Ahimsaka—and yet she had this intuition. Her son had never returned home from the university. There had been that foretelling at his birth that he would become some sort of bandit. And so she was suspicious, and she went out to investigate, to see for herself.

The king was heading there, his mother was heading there, and then the Buddha comes into the story. With his awareness—and this is one of the mystical or magical parts of the story—he surveyed the world with his mind and saw this situation playing out. He apparently had many lifetimes of connection with Angulimala and knew from this surveying that a terrible situation was about to unfold: the mother was going to try to stop her son from getting his thousandth finger, which would have fulfilled Angulimala's duty to his teacher.

According to Buddhist psychology, Buddhist metaphysics, if you kill a parent in this life, there is no way your mind would ever be able to become fully free in this lifetime. And yet one thing about the teaching around freedom is that there is no one who is beyond redemption—there is always the possibility for freedom. What I'm pointing to here is that in *this* life, the action of killing a parent is so agitating for the mind that there would be no way that mind could ever settle, could ever let go into complete surrender, complete release from clinging. It would always be holding on to that action in some fashion—denying it, pushing it away, regret, remorse, self-justification, whatever. The mind would not be able to let go in this lifetime. That's not to say that over the course of many lifetimes a person could not eventually become free, but in this lifetime, it would not be possible.

And yet the Buddha also saw in his surveying of Angulimala's mind that even having killed 999 people, his mind had so much wholesomeness from his stream of previous lives, previous actions, that he had the capacity to fully awaken in this lifetime—if he did not kill his mother.

And so the Buddha decided to intervene, to put himself in the picture. He thought, "If I go there, if I go into the forest, Angulimala will see me and try to kill me instead of killing his mother."

These three scenarios were playing out simultaneously. The Buddha entered the forest and saw

Angulimala. Angulimala, from his lookout, saw the Buddha. Though recognizing his mother, still the thought arose to complete the thousand fingers by killing her. At that moment, the Buddha appeared on the road between Angulimala and his mother. Seeing him, Angulimala thought, "Why should I kill my mother for the sake of one finger when there is someone else? Let her live." And so he turned towards the Buddha.

At this point, the Buddha performed a feat of supernormal power. The bandit Angulimala, going as fast as he could, running to catch up with the Buddha, was unable to reach him. The Buddha was walking at his normal pace—a slow, mindful walk through the forest—and Angulimala, running as fast as he could, could not catch up. Confused by this, he yelled out, "Stop, monk, stop!"

The Buddha responded, turning and saying over his shoulder, "I have stopped, Angulimala. It is time for you to stop."

This shook Angulimala because the Buddha was still walking while Angulimala was standing still. He said, "What do you mean? You're still walking. I've stopped. How have you stopped and I have not?"

The Buddha responded, "Angulimala, I have stopped forever, forswearing violence to every living being. But you have no restraint towards things that breathe. So that is why I have stopped, and you have not."

At this point, Angulimala experienced a turning of the mind. It was almost as if his childhood with love and care—or perhaps previous lives—came back to him, and he remembered something of his other nature.

This is a wisdom teaching here, and it's a teaching on ethics, pointing to the stopping of harm. But it's also a pointing to, in some ways, the stopping of ignorance. Ignorance leads to unwholesome behavior, leads to unethical behavior, leads us to harm others. It also creates harm for ourselves. And so I think that this stopping the Buddha is pointing to here is not only about stopping unethical actions, but the deeper stopping of ignorance—the deeper stopping of the root of what leads to that unethical action.

Angulimala felt like he'd found a new teacher. He asked the Buddha if he could study with him, and the Buddha agreed. Angulimala decided to keep his name, Finger Garland, to help him remember that tendency of mind towards delusion.

I'm not quite sure how all these pieces come together, but Angulimala and the Buddha headed back to the Buddha's monastery. Meanwhile, the king was still looking for Angulimala, intending to kill him. The king, knowing where the Buddha was staying, stopped at the monastery with his army and paid respects to the Buddha.

The Buddha asked, "Why do you have the army?"

King Pasenadi replied, "I'm looking for Angulimala."

The Buddha said, "Great King, if you were to see Angulimala with shaven head and beard, clad in yellow robe, gone forth from the home life into homelessness—that he was abstaining from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, and from false speech, eating only one time a day, living the life of purity and virtue and noble conduct—if you saw him thus, how would you treat him?"

"Venerable sir, we should pay homage to him, invite him to accept the four requisites of a monk, and arrange for his protection. But how could such an unvirtuous person of evil character have such virtue and restraint?"

Then the Buddha extended his right arm and said, "Great King, this is Angulimala." Because Angulimala was sitting right next to the Buddha.

The king was greatly alarmed and his hair stood on end. He entirely lost his composure—so terrifying was Angulimala's reputation. But the Buddha said, "Do not be afraid, great king. There is nothing for you to fear."

When the king regained his composure, he asked Angulimala for his birth name. And he realized that this had been the child born years before, that night when the weapons were sparkling. He knew that this was a child he actually remembered. And so he offered him protection. He offered him robes.

To me, there's an interesting counterpoint that happens here in the story. The Buddha is with Angulimala, the king comes, and the Buddha says, "You have nothing to fear." The teacher, the one in power, the one with elevated authority, tells the king, "Trust me."

This is an interesting counterpoint because it's the flip side of the teacher telling Ahimsaka, "Trust me, this is what you have to do." So what's the difference here? This question comes to my mind: How do we know that the king can trust the Buddha?

And again, the story points back to ethics. Ahimsaka was being asked to do something that caused harm. That should be a warning sign. The Buddha was asking the king to not cause harm. So again, we're pointing back to ethical conduct in teachers and what teachers are asking of us.

This also points to the possibility of redemption for Angulimala, because he has become ordained. And the king is believing in this possibility of redemption at this point. Perhaps we can use ethics as a touchstone, heading back into our lives, remembering how important ethics is for us to combat ignorance and craving, letting it be a kind of warning sign for us.

This part of the story up until now has been very much about the relational dimension of life—how we influence each other. In the first part of the story, we saw how greed, aversion, and delusion generate more greed, aversion, and delusion. In the part where the Buddha comes in, we see how kindness and compassion generate kindness and compassion in the king, supporting Angulimala to take a new direction.

This interweaving, this way in which we impact and affect each other, has been a big part of this story so far. And I think it's a big one for us in going back home—to recognize not only how we are affected but how we affect. What we put into the world is not a small thing. It has ripple effects that we cannot possibly comprehend, rippling out from us.

But there's also an internal dimension to our experience, and the next part of the story picks that up. Because Angulimala sits down and tries to meditate. He goes out for alms rounds and is not very well received in the neighborhood—because at this point, they know who he is. But in his practice... I mean, can you imagine having killed 999 people and sitting down to meditate? The kinds of things that might arise in the mind.

The story proposes something profound about what Angulimala faced in his practice. He had not been able to focus his mind on the basic meditation subject he had received, though he tried day and night. Before his mind's eye appeared the place in the jungle where he had slain so many people. He heard their plaintive voices imploring him—"Let me live, my lord, I'm a poor man and have many children." He saw the frantic movements of their arms and legs in the fear of death. When faced with such memories, deep remorse gripped him and made him get up from his seat and leave.

And so this was a struggle. The practice for Angulimala was not easy. And that makes sense to me—it makes a great deal of sense to me.

There's also a piece of this story where, in going on alms rounds, he's not receiving much in the way of alms. But he continues to do this each day, going through the village. And one day he hears a woman in the pain of childbirth, really experiencing the pains of labor, and his heart is broken open in compassion. He said, "Oh, beings experience so much suffering," and felt compassion for this woman—and also a broader compassion for all beings who suffer.

This is a transformative moment for Angulimala, I think—that moment where the heart is able to take in the suffering of others. When we're behaving unethically, we have to close our hearts to the suffering of others. We have to close our hearts to the harm we cause. Our hearts don't want to feel that when we're behaving unethically, and so it creates a kind of block for us. This part of the story points to the softening of the heart that's happening—the transformation taking place. Feeling the pain of the world.

In response, the Buddha suggests that Angulimala could go to that woman experiencing pain and say—and he actually suggests two things, which is a bit odd. He says, "Angulimala, go to that woman and say: 'Since I was born, I have never purposely deprived a living being of life. By that truth, may you and the infant be safe.'"

Perhaps this was a way of testing Angulimala's willingness to follow blindly what the teacher said. But Angulimala responded, "I can't do that. That is not true. I cannot do that."

And so here is another kind of counterpoint in the story where the Buddha asks Angulimala to do

something—but in this case, what he's asking him to do is to lie. And Angulimala says no.

So the Buddha changes the statement. He says, "Then Angulimala, say to the woman: 'Since I was born with the noble birth, I have never purposely deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you and the infant be saved.'"

This Angulimala felt he could say truthfully—that since he ordained, since he started on the path that the Buddha taught, he had never purposely deprived anyone of life. And the story goes that the woman had an easier childbirth because he said that to her—one of the mystical, magical teachings in the suttas.

But the other piece of it, and perhaps a piece that points back for us, is that it seemed to create conditions for Angulimala to remember that those actions he had done—the memories of the murders rising in his mind—those were in the past, and he was no longer in danger of doing that. The statement was a reminder to Angulimala of his ethical conduct. And the text says that not long after that point, Angulimala's mind settled and he became one of the arahants—as all good Buddhist stories end, with the person becoming fully enlightened.

But this is also something we can reflect on. Through the reflection on sila, remembering your own goodness—if you're finding your mind struggling with things from the past, or just struggling to settle—perhaps recalling your own goodness, remembering your own ethical conduct, bringing to mind what you've been cultivating here, the wholesome qualities, can create conditions for the mind to be able to settle.

I'll end with reading a couple of the verses that Angulimala composed after his awakening:

Who once did live in recklessness
and then is reckless no more
shall illumine the world
like the full moon set free from a cloud.

Who checks unprofitable deeds,
who checks the evil karma,
shall illumine the world
like the moon unveiled from a cloud.

Oh, they are fools who have no wits,
who give themselves to recklessness.
But those of sense guard diligence
and treat it as their greatest good.

Oh, give not way to recklessness
nor harbor love of sense desires,

but diligently meditate
so as to reach the perfect bliss.

I stayed in forests, at the root of a tree,
in mountain caves—
but with an agitated heart.
Now I rest and rise in happiness
and happily spend my life,
for now I am free of Mara's snares.
Oh, for the pity shown me by the master.

free of craving, without grasping, with guarded senses well restrained. Eliminated the root of misery, the ending of all taints attained.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.